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DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE READER.

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THE EFFECTIVE READER SHOULD DEVELOP WORD ATTACK SKILLS, AN ADEQUATE VOCABULARY, AND THE ABILITY TO ADJUST READING RATE TO THE PURPOSE FOR READING. THESE SKILLS ARE INTRODUCED AND REINFORCED AT EVERY GRADE LEVEL WITH INCREASING DEGREES OF REFINEMENT FROM YEAR TO YEAR BY BOTH READING TEACHERS AND CONTENT AREA TEACHERS. LESS OBVIOUS BUT EQUALLY VITAL ARE THE CRITICAL READING SKILLS WHICH LEAD TO THE ULTIMATE GOAL IN READING--THE ABILITY TO EVALUATE MATERIAL READ, INTEGRATE IT INTO THE TOTAL EXPERIENCE PATTERN, AND HAVE IT AFFECT BEHAVIOR CHANGE. TO HELP THE STUDENT ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, TEACHERS SHOULD GUIDE HIM IN SELECTING MATERIALS THAT FIT HIS TASTE, READING LEVEL, AND PURPOSE. THIS CAN BE DONE THROUGH A DEVELOPMENTAL READING PROGRAM RUN CONCURRENTLY WITH A PROGRAM WHICH DEVELOPS ATTITUDES, HABITS, TASTES, AND INTERESTS. THIS PROGRAM SHOULD BE CARRIED OUT IN A SCHOOL WHERE SUITABLE READING MATERIALS ARE READILY ACCESSIBLE. THE EFFECTIVE READER, THEREFORE, IS THE PRODUCT OF THE EFFORTS OF THE TOTAL SCHOOL COMMUNITY. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE (SEATTLE, MAY 4-6, 1967). (NS)

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DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE READER

Lifetime Reading Habits, Secondary

Just what is an effective reader? Is an effective reader one who has attained the mastery of a specific number and/or type of skills, such as the mastery of those skills deemed necessary for attaining a twelfth-grade reading level? Or, is an effective reader one who has been imbued with certain positive attitudes toward reading and who reads avidly throughout his nonacademic life? Obviously, the answer is that effective reading is a combination of both of these equally important aspects of reading. The effective reader is one who has achieved a skill level which will enable him to read most of the material which will confront him throughout his life;

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not only academic material but the everyday reading of advertisements, newspapers, magazines, etc., He is one who has developed the ability to project himself into the material as is able to derive ideas and concepts which ultimately affect his behavior-pattern?

Let us now examine these components more closely. What are the skills necessary for an individual if he is to become an effective reader? First, he has mastered enough word attack skills that word pronounciation does not hinder the fluidity of his reading. Secondly, he has a vocabulary sufficient to handle with ease of understanding most of the material which he will be reading. Thirdly, he has learned to adjust his reading rate to his purpose for reading the selected material.

Who is to teach these skills? Where do they fit into the curriculum pattern? These particular skills are not designated as being taught at any one grade level. It is our responsibility to see to it that the student who will drop out in the tenth grade has as much opportunity to acquire these skills as does the college-bound academic student. These skills should be introduced and reinforced at every grade level throughout the secondary school, with the material and degree of refinement and sophistication being altered from year to year. The development of reading skills is a continuous and lifelong process; skill development does not adhere to any one grade level.

The development of the skills previously noted is the responsibility not only of the reading and/or English teacher. It is the responsibility of all the content area teachers in the secondary school. The social studies teacher points out new vocabulary and helps the student define the terms as they have specific meanings in the social studies. For example, the word "escalation" appears to have taken on an added usage within the past few years, and even that usage varies from newspaper to newspaper. The use of "escalation" in the sense of military buildup has also lead reporters to coin another term, "de-escalation." Yet, these terms common as they may be, should be studied in the social studies class as that teacher is probably best qualified to incite investigation and understanding concerning the use of the terms in their present context. As we know, each subject area has its own special vocabulary and the content area teacher should be responsible for introducing and using course terminology. Wherever possible, the teacher should also point out the meanings the word may have in other subject areas and thus provide a total word experience. When the mathematics teacher introduces and uses the term "meter," he should also show how the term is applied in the study of poetry in the English class.

The secondary school student should also be developing more efficient reading skills; this means

reading smoothly and at a speed which is suited to both his purpose and comprehension level as well as increasing the amount of information obtained per unit of reading time. Again, it is important that all students be given the opportunity to acquire this skill. Along this line, the student should be given a chance to practice such things as adjusting speed to purpose, surveying material before reading to gain a quick overview of the material, and developing skimming techniques which are applicable in the preparation of certain assignments. For example, the student might be asked to compare the time necessary to read a selection when generalizations are asked for with the time it takes to read the same material when questions of a more detailed nature are to be asked. Time limits might be set to see how much content and/or detail could be gained from quickly looking at each selection and noting the subheads, dates, italics, figures and names. Skills such as these aid the student to gain much from the material, without plodding through each and every word of the selection. The skills are practiced and refined progressively at each grade level, and the opportunity for practice should be provided in all content area courses. This may be done through in-class assignments and/or homework assignments. With this it is presumed that study type reading skills such as outlining, notetaking, writing of summary paragraphs, etc. will be fostered in

all classes.

There are also many less obvious skills which are needed to develop the effective reader. These may be more subtle but they are not necessarily any less vital. These are the skills of involvement; i.e., it is these skills that lead the reader to react to and to utilize what has been read. This calls for the reader to judge and evaluate what is read and then to integrate the experience obtained into his total philosophical scheme. This is, perhaps, the ultimate goal of reading.

What are the factors which contribute to the achievement of such a goal? In essence, it might be stated that the reader displays a selectiveness about the material he chooses to read, he is sensitive to what is read, he is able to evaluate and make decisions regarding the content of the material, and he reacts to the material to the extent that he utilizes it in terms of his own experiences.

In developing a selective reader, it is imperative that we avoid imparting our own values and standards regarding the choice of reading materials. The student must be guided into developing his own criteria for selecting material. Our guidance comes mainly in three ways.

First, we must guide the student to select material which is comfortable for him to read, not too difficult

yet not too easy. Second, we must help the student to develop interests through reading, but we must also be willing to accept his interests at a particular moment and help him find materials which fit these interests. We encourage him to read on a certain topic if that is his choice. His interests will change quickly enough. He should not be forced to read something different.

So many times we have heard the student complain that he never finished reading a particular book because it "just wasn't interesting." If this happens too frequently, the interest in finding out just what is between the covers of a book will be lost. We can help a student by giving him a chance to find what a book is like before he actually checks the book out of the library. This we do by encouraging and showing the student how to browse through books. Let him take several books to a table; let him read the blurbs, read through a few pages and generally get a feel for the books before making a decision as to what book to select. Teachers and librarians need to encourage browsing. Many book stores have found this idea to their advantage. The signs which read, "If you open it you've bought it," are being replaced by signs which encourage the person to "browse freely."

Third, we must assist the student to find books which will fit his purpose for reading. If he is looking for a relaxing, smooth-reading, relatively uncomplicated

book, Dr. Zhivago would probably not be such a wise choice. If he is looking for information about the bushment of Africa, he should know that a book in novel form such as The Harmless People will most likely yield as much information about the topic as would a more somber-reading reference book. Essentially, it is important that we help the studnet to develop the ability to select materials in accordance with his individual abilities, interests and needs.

Next, let us look at the sensitive reader. This reader is one who is atuned to the use and values of language. He reacts to the varied uses of the language, its words and phrases and it patterns and rhythms. This person is able to feel the difference the language produces in mystery stories such as an Agatha Christie or a Sherlock Holmes as opposed to the type of language found in a Mickey Spilane or Perry Mason mystery. He realizes that language is rather basic in creating the climate of the story and in producing a mental picture for the reader. The sensitivity is also exhibited by the fact that he realizes the tremendous impact which language holds. He is aware that its force is so great that it has often shaped the course of events in the history of man. It has not only preserved the learning of past civilizations and peoples, but it also assists in shaping present ideas and hence in building foundations for the course of future

events.

Critical reading is one of the most vital ingredients needed to produce the effective reader. Without this ability, the reader is unable to utilize what is read. Since critical reading has been discussed previously, it will be touched upon only briefly in this presentation. The critical reader is one who reacts to the material in that he makes decisions and judgments about it. He must be concerned with such things as the qualifications of the author to write on the topic; the authenticity of the factual information which is presented; the particular biases which were evidences; and according to recent revelations, it might be significant to know the source of financial support for the writing and publication of the material.

This skill can be developed by such activities as having the student read two different books on the same topic and compare the presentations and the background of the authors. It might also be helpful to have four or five newspapers and/or news magazines which have the same news events recorded and have a class compare such things as the position of the article, the headline, style of presentation, number of facts included or deleted, the selection of words and their usage, and the amount of editorializing within the article. The student might also be given an assignment to write a news article on

an incident which happened at school or in the community. This usually serves as a successful technique for showing how easy it is for personal feelings and biases to creep into an objective appraisal of an event.

In our present society where we are constantly being bombarded with printed and visual stimuli, we are continuously having to make decisions on the basis of the printed material presented to us. Often we do not have the time or the perseverance to dig out the facts for ourselves. Every housewife is forced to make numerous decisions on the basis of what she has read or heard via advertisements. She decides what brand of detergent, what brand of soup, and even which refrigerator will best suit her family's needs.

Sometimes it is nearly impossible to read critically all the information presented, but at least we can make certain that the student is made cognizant of the fact that most advertizing is propaganda and point out the value of questionning what is written. It might be a valuable experience to take a group, perhaps from a rading class, shopping in a super market and provide them with a lesson in the value of critical reading. Have them read and compare the labels on similar but differently priced items, looking at such things as weight, and contnets to see if one really deserves to be priced higher than the other. Also have them look and figure

out the pricing on the "specials." I put myself through such an experience while shopping and found that I spent three hours in the market just reading and comparing labels. However, it was an unforgetable lesson in the importance of not believing everything I read. The student needs to be exposed to such exercises that will point out the need and value of reading critically in everyday living; too many view it merely as an academic exercise.

In the classroom the student should be led to evaluate the material presented in his textbook and that which he has obtained through supplemental reading. Here again reading is a part of every teacher's responsibility. Social studies provides an excellent area for fostering critical reading skills. In the sciences there are also many "facts" that are still being debated in the literature, and the student should be expected to apply critical reading skills when attacking this material. As reading teachers, either developmental and/or remedial, we should certainly stress the importance of reading material with a critical eye. All too often I have seen reading teachers give a reading exercise, have the student answer the question, and never bother to take more than a perfunctory glimpse at the content of the material.

Another factor necessary to have an effective reader is the development of the ability to take the

material which is read and after evaluating it critically, integrate the material into the total experience pattern and thus have it affect a behavior change. This is at the apex of reading skills. This skill and habit appears to be developed mainly through lively discussion of the books, articles, authors and their ideas. A discussion provides the opportunity for the student to do something with what he has read. It provides the sounding board for refining the ideas gained and for obtaining the opinions of others as to the general acceptance of the concepts. It is the vehicle for crystalizing thinking. It might be noted that this point is built on the premise that the student has had complete freedom in his choice of material, within the context of the reading assignment, and in his discussion of what he considered to be the important and provoking parts of the material.

Now that the reader has developed many of the skills necessary for effective reading, it is necessary to turn attention to the program which must run concurrent with the skills program. That is the program which develops attitudes, desires, and reading habits. Unless the skills are developed in such a manner to enable the student to gain an appreciation and desire for reading, the chances are that he will rarely read on his own volition after he leaves secondary school. (In fact, in a 1957 Gallup poll in response to the question, "Do

you happen to be reading a book at the present time?" only seventeen percent answered "yes." Of this group fifty-seven percent were college graduates, and nineteen percent were secondary school graduates.

When we ask the student what he is reading outside of school his answer is usually, "Nothing." The above average student usually gives the excuse of not having any time. However, with the less academic student it is usually a case of having no desire to read because of the frustration he has met in reading in school. He has been forced to read textbooks and materials which are beyond his level and therefore generally has met with academic failure. The teacher must accept the reading level of the student and try to provide materials at his reading level. Too often the frustration can even be traced back to the reading teacher. In the eagerness to equip the student with necessary skills, the teacher has failed to give him a chance to get into appropriate books and actually experience the joy which comes from successfully reading interesting material. Many secondary reading classes are little more than skill shops; the student is so busy doing exercises, workbooks, etc. that he never gets a chance to realize what reading is all about. Give the student a chance to be successful and perhaps he will be further stimulated in his reading. Allow him to develop a desire and interest in reading.

This desire and interest in reading is often a direct reflection of the attitude of the teacher toward reading. Thus while helping a student the teacher must exhibit positive attitudes and habits of reading. Reading must be sold; we as teachers must be the enthusiastic salesmen. This might be done by reading parts of books to a class, referring to books in general class discussion, and by showing excitement about books and materials we ourselves have read.

Reading also needs to be made a habit. We must make the student feel that reading is just as natural as taking a bath. He need feel that the newspaper is to be served with breakfast and that reading a good book a few minutes before going to bed is the only way to relax in order to get to sleep. As teachers, we can set an example by having reading material with us most of the time. Let the student see us carrying the books we are currently reading.

If one is to acquire a habit of reading, materials must be readily accessible. We should see to it that the books in the library are as easy to check out as books are to purchase in the drug store. Desire or habit will not be fostered if it is a herculean task to get to the library during the hours it is open. The library should be open for several hours after school and ideally it should be open into the evening hours.

As previously stated, all of these factors we have just discussed are the components which are necessary in the development of an effective lifetime reader. This reader is not the product of one specific set of skills neither is he the result of one specific teacher. The effective reader is the result of a continuous and sustained pattern of reading development which is promoted and enhanced by the efforts of the total school community.

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